

Proteus

Computer: Commodore 64
 Publisher: Research Design Associates
 P.O. Box 848
 Stony Brook, NY 11790
 Medium: Disk
 Price: \$79.95

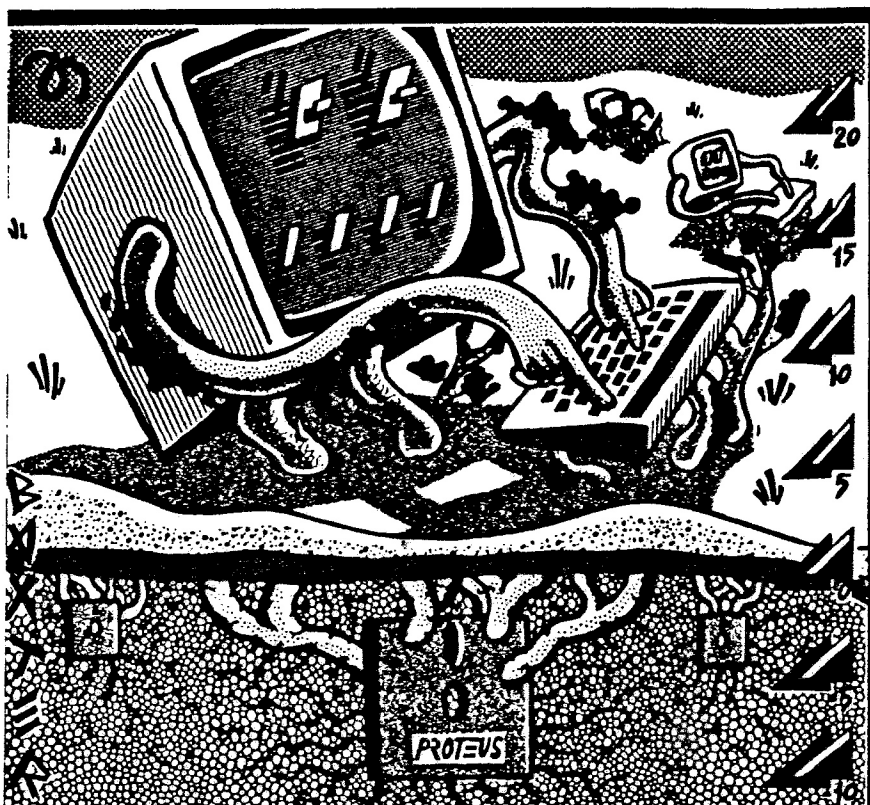
What a concept! I load my word processor, tingling with anticipation. Three false starts later, I stand in the kitchen munching on a cold piece of last night's chicken. I am uncomfortably aware of that blinking cursor taunting me from the other room, and of all that blank space around my two solitary sentences. Maybe it wasn't such a great idea for a story after all. And so, another terrific idea bites the dust.

What went wrong? For most of us, the biggest problem with writing is not the original idea. The problem is what to do with it once you've got it. How do you transform that tiny seed into a full-blown plant? What's the secret ... the magic ... the tool? The secret is "pre-writing." The magic is "free writing." The tool is *Proteus*.

Proteus. Sounds familiar. Isn't Proteus that weird soothsayer from the annals of Greek mythology who could change his shape at will? Right. But wrong *Proteus*. I'm talking about the pre-writing idea processor from Research Design Associates. Nevertheless, one point regarding *Proteus*, the Greek myth, has bearing on the theories behind *Proteus*, the software. It was because of his shape-shifting that *Proteus* became acclaimed as the personification of the "original matter from which all the world was created."

Whatever you write—be it an essay, story, poem, song or novel—your ideas are the original matter from which your creation is made. Unfortunately, original matter without a blueprint doesn't really matter. To put it bluntly, a terrific idea, unexplored, will remain merely a terrific idea.

To reach its potential, an idea must first be plundered: mercilessly fragmented into its most elemental ingredients and then rearranged, brainstormed, subtracted from, added to, adjusted and rearranged again—until



Proteus helps writers of any age or expertise transform the tiny seed of an idea into a full blown plant

all the bits and pieces fall magically together with a purpose and a point.

It is in this process of breaking down and breathing life into an idea that *Proteus* comes along. *Proteus* is comprised of five interactive modules: "Listing," "Freewriting," "Looping," "Cubing," and "The Five W's."

"Listing" allows you to create numbered lists of thoughts and information. This is the place to begin. If you already have the idea, "Listing" allows you to explore what you already know about your topic, "road map" possible twists and turns, or outline the basic structure of your manuscript. "Listing" can also be used to clarify individual elements.

"Freewriting" is what it sounds like. When you freewrite, it is important not to pause or ponder. On the contrary, it is very important to refrain from any kind of self-censorship—just type whatever comes into your head, as quickly as you can, without concern for correctness or content. To help keep the ball rolling, "Freewriting" chimes and flashes the message—KEEP WRITING—if you pause for more than ten seconds. However, you can hit the F1 key to take a breather.

The "Looping" module allows for revision and expansion on ideas created by "Freewriting." It allows you to zero in on any particular thought within a freewriting file, and then freewrite on that concept by itself.

"Cubing" is a way of looking at a subject from six different angles. You can start with a new idea or select a topic from previous work within any other module. After you name your cubing session, you will be prompted to analyze. As with the other modules, type in whatever occurs to you. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers; only free-flowing, spontaneous thoughts. When you are done analyzing, you are prompted to freewrite the other five sides of the

cube: compare, contrast, argue for, argue against, and define.

The last *Proteus* module is called "The Five W's." Here you answer the five primary questions: who, what, when, where, and why. In this module, again, you answer each question, writing down everything that pops into your head, using the free-flowing freewriting technique. This module clarifies the structure of a given topic.

Proteus is extremely easy to use. The entire program uses just three command keys, so learning to use *Proteus* takes about ten seconds. It is also extremely flexible, allowing you to move back and forth from one module to another, and from one topic to the next and back again, as often as you wish. And while you're busy with all this shifting around, you never have to suffer the agonies of forgetting to hit the "save" key, because there is no save key—*Proteus* saves all text from every module automatically.

This program is so good that the few criticisms I do have don't affect in the least my overall highest recommendation. The 40-page manual covers pre-writing techniques thoroughly, but its format is somehow unaesthetic. Fortunately, the abundance of truly helpful help screens that explain and exemplify all *Proteus* modules in great detail makes the manual more or less extraneous.

I have no problem whatsoever with the fact that *Proteus* does not allow you to produce a final draft. Writing is basically a three-phase undertaking: pre-writing, writing, and re-writing. *Proteus* creates the ideal structure and environment for the first pre-writing phase. Let your word processor take care of phase two and three. My only regret is that, although *Proteus* lets you print out your work, there is no facility for transferring your *Proteus* files into your word processing program. This particular convenience would make the transition from pre-writing to writing more fluid.

(Editor's Note: Users can, however, upgrade to a version that will transfer to your word processor.)

From student to up-and-coming novelist, *Proteus* is without a doubt an invaluable tool for writers of any age or expertise.

Paul Whitehead Teaches Chess

Computer: Commodore 64
Publisher: Enlightenment Inc.
1240 Sanchez St.
San Francisco, CA 94114

Medium: Disk
Price: \$49.95

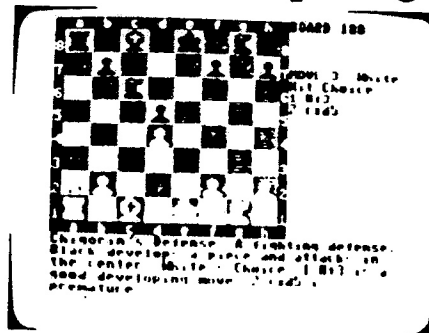
Chess is intriguing. This is especially true when a pair of masters like Anatoli Karpov and Gary Kasparov get together. But there are many people who know very little of the subtle strategies of the game, and still more who know absolutely nothing about it. This program starts with the very basics of chess and builds to an intermediate level. Paul Whitehead, who designed the tutorial, was a chess master at 15. That was almost ten years ago. Since then, he has won state, junior and American championships. In this program, he successfully lays the groundwork for a novice chess player without being condescending.

There are three disks in *Paul Whitehead Teaches Chess*. One contains the "Coffeehouse Chess Monster," an opponent program by Julio Kaplan, a chess programmer and champion himself. The other two form the tutorial, which covers the basic rules, tactics for each piece, opening principles and endgame. Quizzes are provided to test your understanding.

Many of the more than 600 different boards offer you choices based on the teachings you have received to date. When the right move is made, you are applauded, but when you make a wrong move, you are shown the consequences of that move and why it was wrong. Each of the 600 boards is selected from menus. Each menu requires disk access, as does each board. So, by the time I had seen all the boards from both disks, I had spent a lot of time waiting for my drive to do its job.

In spite of this, the program is very informative and generally easy to use. The chess pieces are well drawn, so there is little chance of confusing one

Start with the basics of chess and move to an intermediate level. Then test your skill on an opponent program included in the package.



with another. The game program is set up so that you can create any board situation found in the tutorial, play it out, and then return to your place in the tutorial. Each chess piece is assigned a point value. This makes it easier for the beginner to see if a swap of pieces would be an advantage or disadvantage. Standard notation is also taught, and with a printer, that notation can be recorded for all your games. Since each move is generated by keyboard entry, it is imperative that you understand standard notation, because those are the instructions you'll be typing.

Once you feel you're ready to face competition, access the "Coffeehouse Chess Monster." This computer foe has nine different levels. The computer can play you or play itself. It is also possible for two humans to square off. You can un-do any moves made by you or the computer. Those can then be replayed.

The documentation is good, especially the road maps telling where each board is located by both number and subject, and then letting you call up any board. The actual rules and procedures can be found on four pages of "All You Need to Know." But there is much more you'll discover on your own.

Overall, the program is for those who have the burning desire to learn chess from square one.

RESEARCH DESIGN ASSOCIATES, INC.

Mind Builders

P.O. BOX 848
STONY BROOK, NEW YORK 11790
(516) 928-5700

PROTEUS—The Idea Processor (7 and up)
PROTEUS Jr. (for Elementary Writers)

SOFTWARE REVIEWS

PROTEUS: THE IDEA PROCESSOR

A pre-writing tool for generating and organizing ideas.

Grade Level: 7 and up
Instructional Design: Outstanding
Content: Outstanding
Interest Level: Outstanding
Ease of Use: Outstanding
Support Materials: Outstanding
OVERALL VALUE: Outstanding

This pre-writing tool is aptly named for the Greek god who could change his form at will. In fact, it's a godsend for teachers struggling with the most common student writing question: "Where do I begin and what do I say?" *Proteus* will help unlock the flow of words and ideas students need to write because it encourages students to manipulate the form of their ideas until they arrive at a shape they like.

DESCRIPTION: The program contains five sections. "Freewriting" prods students to get lots of thoughts down on by beeping and flashing messages every time the writer stops for more than 10 seconds. "Looping" allows for revision and expansion on ideas created by freewriting. "Listing" creates numbered lists of ideas. "Cubing" prompts students to analyze, compare, contrast, argue for, and define their concept. "Five W's" asks students to respond to five simple questions.

The program allows students to move ideas from one section of the program to another, and to save and print out their pre-writing. Each section has a help screen.

STRENGTHS: *Proteus* encourages creative thinking by prompting students to write and by giving them an easy-to-use tool to manipulate the ideas once they have put them in words. It allows for as many "starts" as a student desires and fosters as many approaches as a student is willing to try.

The help screens found in each section are especially good. They contain sample entries on the topic of rock concerts, an item of obvious interest to young writers. The examples provided are an excellent aid to the student trying to grasp what *Proteus* can do. The 40-page manual, though lacking in illustrations, is thorough in its approach and, except in a few instances, easy to understand. Fortunately, the program is designed so that using it is often as easy, or easier, than reading the manual.

WEAKNESSES: Making the transition from raw ideas to published product is, of course, what writing is all about. Here the teacher will have to step in and guide the student from idea to finished product. The major problem in using *Proteus* is that it does not allow the user to produce a final draft. There is no way to transfer the work a student develops using *Proteus* to a word processor so that insertions and deletions can be made and a polished version created. Students will have to retype their ideas if they use a regular word processing program. *Proteus* would be much improved if it contained a word processor that could read the files created in the other modules and allow students to edit their work into a final form.

Another desirable feature would be to have a true outlining capability as one of the modules. The "Listing" feature can not be used to create conventional outlines with hierarchical ordering of ideas.

—Reviewed by Stan Solomon, Computer Science Teacher, Manhattan Center for Science and Mathematics, New York, NY

Hardware: Apple II series (64K).

Publisher: Research Design Associates, PO Box 848, Stony Brook, NY 11790; 516/928-5700

Price: \$79.95; 10 additional disks for \$250

Preview: No preview allowed
Backup: No backup
Circle 124 on Reader Service Card.

PROTEUS files
can now be
transferred to
ANY
word processor
using text files!
Bank Street
Writer, too!
A PERFECT
program??

You judge...
Write or call
for a 30 day
preview copy!!!

FAMILY COMPUTING

Proteus

HARDWARE REQUIREMENTS: Reviewed on Apple IIe and IIc. Also for C 64; planned for IBM PC/PCjr.
MANUFACTURER: Research Design Associates, Inc.
PRICE: \$80

A blank page of paper. An empty computer screen. Both often intimidate writers starting a piece and frequently cause lamentations like, "What do I write about? How should I begin?"

So we postpone writing until the deadline nears, then rush to complete the assignment. This leaves little time to think through an idea and even less to revise. Yet, those awkward beginning moments can be overcome with techniques employed before the first draft.

Proteus, an "idea-processor," is an educational tool for developing such techniques. By writing down all our ideas on a subject, the theory goes, we can decide what to say and how to best approach it.

Five "modules" aid organization. "Freewriting" makes it easy to jot down ideas without worrying about mechanics. "Looping" develops ideas by focusing on individual topics. "Listing" provides an orderly, numbered sequence. "The 5 Ws"—who, what, why, where, and when—help structure the facts. The fifth module, "Cubing," allows you to consider the subject from various analytical perspectives.

My 12-year-old daughter Debbie used *Proteus* before writing a mystery story for her junior high school magazine. She began with "Freewriting" to brainstorm about the plot, characters, setting, and conflicts. Then she worked with "Looping" to expand the story line and develop each character. "Listing" helped plan the sequence of events.

A current-events assignment proved the usefulness of "The 5 Ws" and "Cubing" made an expository writing project more explicit. Both the manual and on-screen prompts were very helpful.

Unfortunately, *Proteus* lacks the word processor capabilities that can even share the workload of a word processor. When you are frustrated when you're not allowed to insert, delete, or revise, it's really annoying to recopy parts of your work when doing the first draft. Despite the excellent outlining techniques *Proteus* encourages, it has definite drawbacks. —GIVEN SOLIMON